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Reading Ezekiel's *Exagoge*: Tragedy, Sacrificial Ritual, and the Midrashic Tradition

Rachel Bryant Davies

EZEKIEL'S *Exagoge*, a second-century BCE Jewish rewriting of the Book of Exodus as a tragedy in Greek, is a striking document reflecting the tension in Hellenistic Jewish culture between literary and cultural assimilation and the assertion of an independent religious commitment.¹ This is the longest Jewish Hellenistic poetic fragment to survive, the most substantial testimony to Hellenistic tragedy, and "the earliest Jewish play in history."² As an Alexandrian dramatisation of the biblical narrative (based on the LXX translation) in Greek tragic form, the fragmentary *Exagoge* raises questions about its generic and cultural relationship with its source-text, Exodus.

Introduction

The *Exagoge* is usually read in terms of (non-)conformity to the classical tradition: how good a Greek tragedy is it? But

¹ Dating, authorship, and provenance are contested, but the consensus is that the *Exagoge* was written in second-century BCE Alexandria by a Jew named Ezekiel. Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors II Poets* (Atlanta 1989) 301–529, offers the most recent discussion in English; see also Pierluigi Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge d'Ezéchiel le Tragique: Introduction, texte, traduction et commentaire* (Leiden/Boston 2006) 1–14, and Howard Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge 1983). The precise date of the *Exagoge* does not affect my discussion of its ideological function. The 17 extant fragments comprise 269 lines of Greek iambic trimeters quoted by Alexander Polyhistor as preserved in Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria. Another 10 lines are sometimes included—see Holladay 526 n.253. About a quarter of the play survives: P. van der Horst, "Moses' Throne Vision in Ezekiel the Dramatist," *JJS* 34 (1983) 21–29, at 21.

² So van der Horst, *JJS* 34 (1983) 22. For an overview of Jewish-Alexandrian literature, see P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria II* (Oxford 1972) 687–716.

although Ezekiel uses the familiar medium of Greek tragedy, he adapts it to conform to the different mindset of his Hellenistic Jewish culture.³ To gain a better understanding of the revitalised significance with which Ezekiel invests his source-text it will be necessary to go beyond debates about how far the *Exagoge* fits the classical criteria for tragedy and instead adopt a fresh perspective. How is the Exodus narrative given new meaning for its new context? In particular, why should Ezekiel choose the *tragic* form to stage the *same* story as the scriptural accounts? And what might Jewish worshippers have gained from such a performance? While superficially the *Exagoge* gains its new meaning through being rewritten as a tragedy, allowing it to engage with classical education and culture, this paper will show how Ezekiel's choice of tragic trimeters is more culturally complex than such a reading would allow.

Scholarship has anxiously affirmed the *Exagoge*'s tragic credentials by identifying particular classical Athenian models. Beyond the general Hellenistic predilection for Euripides, whose plays such as *Helen* (like Exodus, set in Egypt) and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* end in narrow escape from disaster, Jacobson postulates Aeschylus' *Persae* and lost *Danaides* trilogy and Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* as suitable thematic *comparanda*.⁴ However, to posit as a template any one specific play is unnecessary: regardless of how consciously or otherwise Ezekiel undertook the *Exagoge* as an exercise in reception, the fragments reflect an intimate, but catholic, relationship with classical tragedy. The many references noted by scholars construct a patchwork of tragic values rather than a systematic reworking of a particular play.

Moreover, it is in any case Ezekiel's *divergence* from his tragic models which is crucial for understanding the *Exagoge*: the deliberate clash as the biblical subject refuses to fit neatly into Euripidean tragic form. Classical tragedies such as the *Agamem-*

³ The *Exagoge* would probably also have been interesting to contemporary Judaising Greeks. Philo describes how Gentiles as well as Jews participated in the annual festival on Pharos which celebrated the Septuagint translation (*V.Mosis* 2.41).

⁴ Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 24, and "Two Studies on Ezekiel the Tragedian," *GRBS* 22 (1981) 167–178, at 175–178.

non and *Persae* exploit the silences of epic narratives to find, or highlight, tragedy in the *Odyssey*'s prime *exemplum* of filial duty, or demand sympathy for Athens' recently defeated enemy in what may be read as a warning to the city about *hubris*. Ezekiel does not take this expected route, probably because Exodus as a sacred historical narrative held a different meaning for Jewish believers from the meaning of epic and tragedy for Greeks. Rather than focusing on the Egyptians' experiences, for example, or suggesting mixed feelings among the Israelites as they leave Goshen for the desert, the *Exagoge* focuses on God's liberation of the Israelites.

Although there are additions in the drama, most notably the phoenix episode,⁵ the overall narrative progression is the same as in Exodus, but shaped for visual, staged, performance: as a result, seemingly minor discrepancies become more important the more closely Ezekiel otherwise follows the source-text. The most revealing example of this is found in the Passover prescriptions of fragments 13 and 14. This is the heart of the Exodus narrative whereby the salvation of a race is achieved through the substitution of lambs for firstborn sons.

From these fragments, I will argue that the *Exagoge* is not transformed into a tragedy in the way that one would expect from fifth-century classical models because its ultimate aim is not simply to be a Greek tragedy. Instead, Ezekiel utilises the aetiological connotations of tragedy to offer a dramatic performance of the archetypal Passover which, for a Jew in the Diaspora, might have substituted for the sacrificial ritual traditionally only possible in the Temple of Jerusalem.

The performability of the *Exagoge*'s dramatic illusions, however, has been fiercely contested, most notably the transformation of Moses' rod into a serpent and back again,⁶ which caused Zwierlein to conclude that the *Exagoge* could never have

⁵ See n.39 below.

⁶ The challenges that staging this scene, and the voice of God, would have posed to a staged production of the *Exagoge* have been discussed by Andreas Fountoulakis, "Greek Dramatic Conventions in Ezekiel's *Exagoge*," *Platon* 48 (1996) 88–112.

been performed,⁷ while Fountoulakis argues that the scene would have been represented onstage through this verbal description.⁸ Repeatedly, then, critics discuss the *Exagoge*'s performativity as a question of staging *versus* reading;⁹ this is paralleled by scholarly debates on Hellenistic and later texts, such as Seneca's tragedies,¹⁰ Herodas' *Mimes*,¹¹ Callimachus' *Hymns*,¹² and even Theocritus' *Idylls*.¹³

My analysis of the Passover narrative will show that these discussions, when too narrowly applied to the *Exagoge*, misunderstand the fundamental function of this particular text. Performativity *is* the key to the *Exagoge*, but critics have been searching for it in the wrong place; rather, in setting tragedy against Temple ritual through his use of the Passover prescriptions, Ezekiel is doing something radically new, setting himself against both dramatic tradition and modern critical expectation.

It is important to consider briefly the sort of theatrical performances the Greek-speaking Jewish population might have been exposed to, and therefore how Ezekiel's audience might have visualised a performance of the *Exagoge*, even if only internally. Hellenistic theatre appears to have been more diversified than the fifth-century tragedy, comedy, and satyr plays performed at

⁷ O. Zwierlein, *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas, mit einem kritischexegetischen Anhang* (Meisenheim am Glan 1966) 144, cited by Fountoulakis, *Platon* 48 (1996) 91.

⁸ Fountoulakis, *Platon* 48 (1996) 99.

⁹ Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge* 35–38; Holladay, *Fragments* 315; and Jacobson, *GRBS* 22 (1981) 172, argue that the play was intended for performance.

¹⁰ A. J. Boyle, "Senecan Tragedy: Twelve Propositions," *Ramus* 16 (1987) 78–101, at 88–89; G. Williams, "Poet and Audience in Senecan Tragedy: *Phaedra* 358–430," in Tony Woodman and Jonathon Powell (eds.), *Author and Audience in Latin Literature* (Cambridge 1992) 138–149.

¹¹ Giuseppe Mastromarco, *The Public of Herondas* (Amsterdam 1984), and R. L. Hunter, "The Presentation of Herodas' *Mimiamboi*," *Antichthon* 27 (1993) 31–44 (see esp. 40–43).

¹² R. L. Hunter and T. Fuhrer, "Imaginary Gods? Poetic Theology in the *Hymns* of Callimachus," in L. Lehnus et al. (eds.), *Callimachus* (Geneva 2002) 143–175 (see esp. discussion at 176–181).

¹³ R. L. Hunter, *Theocritus: A Selection* (Cambridge 1999) 11.

Athenian dramatic festivals. Scholars examine the evidence for these actors and their organisation and performance practices, but conclude that it is hard to say what Hellenistic performances would actually have looked like.¹⁴ What is consistent is that such plays were, like the *Exagoge*, in iambic trimeters, signifying their seriousness and, in appealing to the classically educated, perhaps transcending religious barriers.¹⁵

Le Guen briefly analyses the *Exagoge*'s discrepancies from classical tragedy as one example of the evolution of Hellenistic tragedy, but is not concerned with the cultural significance of these differences for interpretation of the *Exagoge*.¹⁶ What are the consequences for interpreting the *Exagoge* as an active appropriation which manipulates tragic models for Ezekiel's particular, Jewish Hellenistic context, rather than just an example of passive reception which simply retells Exodus and fails to reproduce a tragedy correctly?

Even when Ezekiel's drama has been considered as performable (tragic) theatre and despite Lanfranchi's convincing proposal that it was originally staged at a Jewish festival,¹⁷ previous work on the *Exagoge* has concentrated on editorial aspects—transmission, authorship, dating, structure. Two editors make the obvious points that the *Exagoge* is “an outgrowth of the biblical text”¹⁸ and a reinterpretation of Exodus in tragic form.¹⁹

¹⁴ E.g., A. Pickard-Cambridge *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (Oxford 1968), and Jane L. Lightfoot, “Nothing to do with the *technitai* of Dionysus?” in P. E. Easterling and Edith Hall (eds.), *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession* (Cambridge 2002) 209–224. See also Brigitte Le Guen, “Le statut professionnel des acteurs grecs à l'époque hellénistique,” in C. Hugoniot et al. (eds.), *Le statut de l'acteur dans l'Antiquité grecque et romaine* (Tours 2004) 77–106.

¹⁵ Pierluigi Lanfranchi, “Ezéchiél le Tragique et la question du théâtre juif ancien,” *Cahiers du Judaïsme* 14 (2003) 18–24, discusses the *Exagoge* as an example of rewriting the Bible to conform to the dominant cultural ideals enforced by secular *paideia*.

¹⁶ Brigitte Le Guen, “‘Décadence’ d'un genre? Les auteurs de tragédie et leurs œuvres à la période hellénistique,” in *A chacun sa tragédie? Retour sur la tragédie grecque* (Rennes 2007) 85–139, at 105–107.

¹⁷ Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge* 64.

¹⁸ Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 130.

¹⁹ Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge* 41.

One even concedes that "we might term the *Exagoge* a mid-rashic drama,"²⁰ but does not develop the implications of this. Neither scholar considers the role which Ezekiel's generic experiment plays within his text.

When the *Exagoge*'s hybridity has been considered, scholarly opinion has been broadly divided: either the synthesis of Jewish Bible and Greek tragedy is seen as unproblematic "acculturation,"²¹ or Ezekiel's appropriation of culturally dominant tragic models in retelling a Bible story is seen as unsuccessful in his apparent violation of tragic structure, in particular the Aristotelian Unities.²² I will argue that the *Exagoge*'s experiment of synthesising the Bible with tragedy is obviously important, but the fact that ultimately Ezekiel cannot and does not synthesise his two sources is at the core of his play.

I will show that it is precisely the work's *resistance* to "Tragedy" which is crucial. In transforming the biblical narrative into Greek drama Ezekiel refuses to make the usual tragedians' moves; rather than giving voice to the silences of an epic narrative, he adopts dramatic structure as a way of negotiating the problem of sacrifice in exile. The very fact that Ezekiel's tragedy does not comply with what is expected of a classical tragedy is important; the *Exagoge* does not expand what the biblical narrative elides. Instead of providing answers,

²⁰ Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 26.

²¹ For example, J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* II (London 1985) 803: "Ezekiel's work represents a synthesis of the context of the biblical narrative of Exodus with the literary form of Greek tragic drama," and Pierluigi Lanfranchi, "L'*Exagoge* d'Ezéchiel: du texte biblique au texte théâtral," *Perspectives* (Revue de l'Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem) 10 (2003) (*Le théâtre juif*) 15–32. Lanfranchi is here concerned with Hellenistic theatre as a product of acculturation; he considers that adapting the Bible to tragedy is Ezekiel's conscious aim and concludes that it is successful (31).

²² Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 28–31. Thomas Kohn, "The Tragedies of Ezekiel," *GRBS* 43 (2002/3) 5–12, even suggests that because of the apparent violation of the unities the fragments may come from a trilogy or tetralogy. See in reply Jacobson, "Ezekiel's *Exagoge*: One Play or Four?" *GRBS* 43 (2002/3) 391–396. Most recently, Le Guen, in *A Chacun sa Tragédie?* 105–108, considers the *Exagoge* as evidence for the evolution of Hellenistic tragedy.

Ezekiel's use of the tragic genre becomes a powerful way of negotiating contemporary concerns.²³ I will argue that the *Exagoge* is a liturgical replacement for that very Passover sacrifice commanded in the biblical text but impossible during the Diaspora in its—by then traditional—ritual form, and that it may be seen as part of the Jewish midrashic tradition.²⁴

Such a text was essential at this time, for this community: the Exodus narrative required retelling in new ways for an audience once again in Egypt and now geographically separated from the Temple in Jerusalem.²⁵ Fundamental to Jewish identity, the story of Exodus commands retelling, memorialisation, and ritual re-enactment to ensure the people of Israel's continued faith. Ezekiel's *Exagoge* provides this opportunity for renewal by its combination of quintessentially Hellenistic hybridity with the Alexandrian adoption of Greek tragic structure to retell a fundamentally epic story.²⁶

My approach avoids the usual objections about the tragic status of the text. I am not asking how far the *Exagoge* fits the category we designate "Tragedy," but how and why it *does not*

²³ Similarly the *Christus Patiens* attributed by some to Gregory of Nazianzus functions in the space between the scriptural and tragic texts, where the mapping of the source texts fails to conform to expectation.

²⁴ For more on *midrash* see Nicholas de Lange, *Judaism* (Oxford 1986) 56. The essential idea is that "every sacred text needs to be continuously interpreted and explained if it is to keep its place in a living religious tradition" (55).

²⁵ The role of Hellenism in reshaping Jewish identity in the Hellenistic world is the subject of Erich S. Gruen's *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley/London 1998). Ch. 2 treats the use and abuse of Exodus, seeing it as a defining moment in ancient Israelite tradition; in ch. 4 (at 128–136) Gruen discusses the *Exagoge* briefly as a retelling of the Exodus story, but one which "scrupulously followed the biblical account" (136).

²⁶ Useful discussions of various aspects of the Diaspora: J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (New York 1986); E. Bickermann, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge [Mass.]/London 1988); W. Davies and L. Finkelstein (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism II Hellenistic* (Cambridge 1989); J. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan* (Edinburgh 1996); P. Borgen, *Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism* (Edinburgh 1996); E. Benbassa and J. Attias, *The Jew and the Other* (Ithaca/London 2004).

fit the genre Ezekiel uses, in order to focus on the more fruitful question of liturgical/dramatic replacement of sacrificial rite, which explains the play's tragic structure. I will proceed from a close reading of the Passover ritual in fragments 13 and 14. These fragments foreground the discontinuities and creative gaps between Ezekiel's drama and its source, inviting consideration of the implications of the *Exagoge* for re-reading Exodus, and showing how Ezekiel's text fits, through its fluid retelling of Scripture, into the Jewish midrashic tradition of memorialisation. This new understanding of the passages concerning the Passover prescriptions encourages reassessment of the text's possible purpose and Ezekiel's choice of the tragic genre, according to the *Exagoge* its due status as active appropriation.

Resisting tragedy

The *Exagoge*'s focus appears to have been the story of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt as narrated in Exodus 1–15.²⁷ This forces consideration of Ezekiel's chosen literary models, and the relation between tragic form and biblical content. While his choice of genre demonstrates his Hellenism, his selection of subject matter announces Ezekiel's religious commitments. Yet the two seem to make uneasy bedfellows despite the cultural fusion of Hellenistic Alexandria; their combination makes Ezekiel's drama an oddity. What does it mean to use the terms "tragedy" and "tragic" of the (Jewish) Bible? What is tragic about the story of Exodus? Behind such questions lurks mistrust with telling this particular story in this way: in what sense can the *Exagoge* be considered a tragedy at all? My proposal is that it is not, and that that is precisely its point.

Exodus' tragic vision has sometimes been located on the human level in the death of first Hebrew, and then Egyptian, children.²⁸ Other possibilities include God's choice of an imperfect mediator (Moses) between earth and heaven as underscoring the essentially unbridgeable gap between the two

²⁷ A helpful introduction to literary analysis of Exodus is J. Fokkelman, "Exodus," in R. Alter and F. Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London 1987) 56–65. A more detailed commentary is Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation* (Louisville 1991).

²⁸ S. M. Langston, *Exodus through the Centuries* (Oxford 2006) 104.

realms,²⁹ and the sense that the distance of Diaspora Jews from Jerusalem symbolises that which separates man and God.³⁰

What is so striking about the *Exagoge* is that it does not develop such an interpretation, in the way that Ezekiel's audience might have expected from the example of classical tragedians who took "slices from Homer's banquets"³¹ and developed the seeds of tragedy implicit in epic. Aristotelian criticism of tragic form is not relevant; instead, Ezekiel capitalises on tragedy's ritual and cultic connotations. The difficulty is not with taking Exodus as the source-text, but with re-telling the *same* biblical story; the issue is not the moves Ezekiel does make, but those he does not. Although Ezekiel plays with the mode in which he delivers his story, and despite some divergences from the biblical narrative (which will be explored), the Exodus narrative of the chosen people's successful escape from Egypt is kept.

God is the prime actor, in both the literal and, paradoxically, dramaturgical senses. Despite—or perhaps because of—His not appearing on stage, it is God's presence which directs the action. Although speaking from the Burning Bush (avoiding the problem of representing on stage a God who forbids graven images),³² His power is emphasised, as it is necessarily in the biblical narrative (LXX Exodus 9:16):

καὶ ἔνεκεν τούτου διετεθήθης, ἵνα ἐνδείξωμαι ἐν σοὶ τὴν ἰσχύον μου, καὶ ὅπως διαγγεῖται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῇ.

But I have spared you for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.³³

²⁹ Martin Buber, *Moses* (Oxford 1946) 59.

³⁰ R. G. Fredman, *The Passover Seder: Afikoman in Exile* (Philadelphia 1981) 41.

³¹ Aeschylus is famously supposed to have claimed this of all his works: Ath. 347E.

³² For discussion of this problem see Fountoulakis, *Platon* 48 (1996) 90–91.

³³ Bible translations are from the NIV. For commentaries on Exodus, see A. McNeile, *The Book of Exodus* (London 1908); U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem 1967); W. Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary II Exodus* (New York 1983); N. Sarna, *The Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia/New York/Jerusalem 1991).

The Deity's central salvific role inhibits any potential for the tragic vision in both Exodus and the *Exagoge*. While Steiner proposes that "Tragedy is that form of art which requires the intolerable burden of [the Judaeo-Christian] God's presence,"³⁴ Goldmann claims "that God should be always present and always absent is the real centre of the tragic vision."³⁵ Despite their obvious differences, both critics agree that, for tragedy to be tragic, God cannot be an actor guaranteeing salvation. "Tragedy is a game ... watched [passively] by God":³⁶ "at the very moment that God appears to man, then man ceases to be tragic."³⁷ In common with other potentially tragic biblical narratives, such as the stories of Saul, David, and Job, Ezekiel's version of Exodus resists critical efforts to categorise it in any pre-existing conceptual frameworks.³⁸ The *Exagoge* does not fail as a Greek tragedy. Rather, it actively resists its tragic potential, precluding that interpretation through its fidelity to Scripture even as the possibility of divergence is explored.

To be sure, there are small discrepancies between the biblical and dramatic accounts, but the *Exagoge* essentially reproduces Scripture with stage embellishments. The most obvious novelties—Moses' dream and the account of the Phoenix—have been much discussed elsewhere;³⁹ here it is sufficient to note that, far from creating a tragic vision, these episodes emphasise discovery and journeying to the Promised Land, almost a new Eden. As the Passover Seder now ends with the hopeful promise "next year in Jerusalem," the extant fragments of the *Exagoge* end with the arrival at the oasis at Elim and the sight of an exotic, mythical bird; both possess strong connotations of re-

³⁴ George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London 1961) 353.

³⁵ Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine* (London 1964) 36.

³⁶ Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form* (London 1974) 152.

³⁷ Goldmann, *The Hidden God* 36.

³⁸ J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge 1992) 1; 151.

³⁹ E.g. J. Heath, "Ezekiel Tragicus and Hellenistic Visuality: The Phoenix at Elim," *JThS* 57 (2006) 23–41; Pierluigi Lanfranchi, "Il sogno di Mose nell' *Exagoge* di Ezechiele il Tragico," *Materia giudaica* 8 (2003) 105–112; van der Horst, *JJS* 34 (1983) 21–29.

generation and renewal.

The most striking example of the tension between loyalty to, and divergence from, the biblical text is offered in fr.13 and 14—the Passover regulations—here given in the form of God’s speech to Moses and repeated (stressing their importance) in Moses’ speech to the Israelites. The discrepancies in the narrative are part of Ezekiel’s dual project of reinterpretation. Another example is Ezekiel’s exegesis of the Egyptians’ “gifts” to the Israelites as payment, *contra* contemporary (and later) anti-Semitic polemic.⁴⁰ Whereas the biblical text allows the exchange of property to be understood as some form of theft (ἤτησαν, lit. “demanded”; ἐσκύλευσαν, “plundered”), the *Exagoge* forestalls this line of interpretation. Despite the verb λήψεται (seize as booty), God’s first-person speech authorises repayment (μισθὸν ἀποδώσι) for the Israelites’ years of labour.

οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ ἐποίησαν, καθὰ συνέταξεν αὐτοῖς Μωυσῆς,
καὶ ἤτησαν παρὰ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων σκεύη ἀργυρὰ καὶ χρυσὰ καὶ
ἱματισμόν. καὶ ἔδωκε Κύριος τὴν χάριν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ ἐναντίον
τῶν Αἰγυπτίων, καὶ ἔχρησαν αὐτοῖς· καὶ ἐσκύλευσαν τοὺς Αἰ-
γυπτίους.

The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The Lord had made the Egyptians favourably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians. (Exodus 12:35–6; cf. 11:3)

δώσω χάριν
λαῷ, γυνή τε παρὰ γυναικὸς λήψεται
σκεύη κόσμον τε πάνθ’ ὃν ἄνθρωπος φέρει,
χρυσόν τε καὶ <τὸν> ἄργυρον ἡδὲ καὶ στολὰς,
ὥν ὅν ἐπραξαν μισθὸν ἀποδώσι βροτοῖς.

I will extend favour
to the people, and a woman shall take from another woman
Furnishings and adornment of every kind that a person bears,
Gold and silver, and garments as well,
In order to repay those mortals for what they did.
(*Exagoge* 162–166; transl. Holladay, modified)

Since this claim of theft assisted much later anti-Semitic po-

⁴⁰ Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 126–127.

lemic, Ezekiel's reinterpretation may indicate a concern not to alienate an ethnically mixed audience (although we possess no evidence of the nature of a Hellenistic Passover), but clearly reveals a desire for positive self-portrayal.

The absence from Ezekiel's extant text of the biblical proscriptions against foreigners, demanding proselytes' circumcision, supports this reading. This regulation does not appear where one would expect to see it, extrapolating from the *Exagoge's* usual appropriation of the biblical order of events. Exodus is explicit that "No foreigner is to eat of it" (πᾶς ἀλλογενῆς οὐκ ἔδεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, 12:43), but that a bought slave (specifically one permanently attached to the household) may eat the Passover "after you have circumcised him" (περιτεμείς αὐτόν· καὶ τότε φάγεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, 12:44). These rules are repeated again, signalling their importance even to the biblical redactors, at 12:48:

ἐὰν δέ τις προσέλθῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς προσήλυτος ποιῆσαι τὸ πάσχα Κυρίῳ, περιτεμείς αὐτοῦ πᾶν ἀρσενικόν, καὶ τότε προσελεύσεται ποιῆσαι αὐτό· καὶ ἔσται ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ αὐτόχθων τῆς γῆς· πᾶς ἀπερίτμητος οὐκ ἔδεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ.

An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the Lord's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it.

The conspicuous non-appearance of this motif in the *Exagoge* may be related to the text's inclusive aspect: Ezekiel follows the spirit, if not the letter, of the prescription that "The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you" (νόμος εἷς ἔσται τῷ ἐγχωρίῳ, καὶ τῷ προσελθόντι προσηλύτῳ ἐν ὑμῖν, Exodus 12:49). This is not "apologetic," since Ezekiel is not engaging polemically with other writers, but rather an aggressively positive re-writing of tradition. This would have been especially important if, as Jacobson proposes, the *Exagoge* was written just after the Maccabean Wars, when Egyptians desiring Greek favour intensified already existing Greek anti-Jewish sentiment.⁴¹

Ezekiel's omissions and alterations are, therefore, important

⁴¹ Jacobson, *The Exagoge* 8–13.

in their own right, beyond mere differences between epic and drama; the contrasts between the biblical text and the *Exagoge* reveal conscious reworking of tradition to construct more positive material. However, here they also point the contrast between Exodus and Ezekiel's treatment of the Passover ritual. These fragments are the one exception in the text: Ezekiel neither introduces an entirely new episode nor slavishly follows the biblical account; rather, the Passover account treads a more subtle tightrope. Here Ezekiel explores the tensions of the interpretative gaps between his work and its model to offer an aetiology which becomes programmatic for the *Exagoge* even as tragic form becomes liturgical replacement.

Passover aetiologies: negotiating sacrifice in exile

The *Exagoge* does not just adopt the privileged literary mode of the dominant culture to reproduce a Greek tragedy; rather, Ezekiel borrows its dramatic structure, drawing on tragedy's aetiological and cultic associations to develop a liturgical replacement for the ritual Passover sacrifice in the Diaspora. But how does dramatisation of the instantiation of the Passover ritual become a way of negotiating sacrifice in exile?

The Passover is the archetypal sacrifice of Judaism, important as the symbol of Israel's covenant with God. This covenant develops the *Akedah*—the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22—universalising Abraham's particular covenant with God to include all the people of Israel (Gen 15), and is at the heart of religious and national identity. Because of this significance, in choosing Exodus as his model and heightening the importance accorded the Passover rituals, Ezekiel not only displays his religious and ideological commitment to Judaism, but also engages with the problem of sacrifice during the Diaspora.

Judaism in its mature, articulated form differs fundamentally from any religious cult in Greece or Rome. Certain essential rituals are possible only in one place at a prescribed time; the Passover may only occur in Jerusalem.⁴² This centralisation, which according to the Tanakh developed during the Davidic monarchy, had a very different role in the Kingdom from its

⁴² This ideology is emphasised by the Second Passover in Jerusalem for those unable to attend the first (Num 9:1–14).

later impact during the Diaspora: by the Hellenistic era, sacrificial cult had evolved from the familial ritual described in Exodus into the priestly, Temple-based ritual of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, problematising the position of Jews away from the Temple in Jerusalem.

It is, then, perhaps his distance from the Temple which causes Ezekiel to identify with the alienation of earlier Israelites in Egypt. Isolated from the centre of religious worship and unable in Alexandria to make proper sacrifice, the natural analogy was with those Jews whom Pharaoh repeatedly forbade to go into the desert to make sacrifices.⁴³ Through the *Exagoge*, Ezekiel reworks the Greek literary configuration of sacrificial ritual to re-establish successful communication with his God.

This reworking is made possible by Ezekiel's appropriation of the broad spectrum of ritual patterns and aetiologies frequently found in tragedy. Greek tragedy, it has been claimed, repeatedly stages corrupted sacrifice.⁴⁴ Performed in a religious context that included sacrifice, the plays often explore the consequences of corrupted ritual: the collapse of order and failure of communication among, and between, men and gods.

However, while it is certainly true that not all tragic ritual is affirmative (for instance, in Euripides' *Electra* the killing of Aegisthus by Orestes while the latter was performing a sacrifice,⁴⁵ the attempted human sacrifice of Iphigenia in *Iphigenia in Aulis*,⁴⁶ and hers of the disguised Orestes and Pylades in *Iphigenia in Tauris*),⁴⁷ it is not all entirely negative either. This more optimistic reading is largely enabled by the aetiologies commonly found at the end of tragedies. In *Iphigenia in Tauris*, for example,

⁴³ E.g. Exodus 5; 8:25–8:32.

⁴⁴ Common tragic imagery discussed by F. Zeitlin, "The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 463–508; for corrupted sacrifice as cause and symptom of sickness in the city, see Soph. *Ant.* 997–1032 (Tiresias' first speech).

⁴⁵ Narrated by the messenger at *El.* 761–858.

⁴⁶ Iphigenia's sacrifice is anticipated by her at *IA* 1470–1474 and by the chorus at 1510–1520. The more detailed messenger speech at 1540–1612, though perhaps an interpolation, looks ahead to the aetiology of *IT*.

⁴⁷ At *IT* 614–635 Iphigenia describes to Orestes the sacrificial ritual she thinks she is about to perform.

not only has ritual (the supposed purification of the sacrificial victims) offered the means of escape, but the play ends with Athena as *dea ex machina* establishing Iphigenia as the chief priestess at Brauron, where she will be the object of cult after her death.⁴⁸

Virtually every Euripidean tragedy (excepting *Troades*, *Alcestis*, and the fragmentary ending of *Bacchae*) ends with some sort of aetiology, usually announced by gods. While aetiologies do not guarantee a “happy ending” (for example, *Hippolytus* still ends with the Hippolytus’ death)⁴⁹ their significance is rather that, by offering an aetiology for some institution known to the audience, they locate the dramas in the context of that knowledge and thus link dramatic illusion to the real, familiar world.

Given these associations with the tragic form Ezekiel chooses, of which he must have been well aware, it is therefore not necessary to enter debates about the possible origins of tragedy in Dionysiac worship or cultic behaviour involving scapegoating to see that Ezekiel here rewrites Greek tragic models to present successful sacrificial communication between the Israelites and their God—but his text is itself a response to the impossibility of that communication during the Diaspora. The *Exagoge* is a re-ritualisation of specifically Jewish religious activity, but in an Alexandrian form; Ezekiel necessarily reinvents ritual for religious regeneration.

Ezekiel’s aetiologies reflect this desire to understand and explain the origins of tradition. This self-consciousness is typically Hellenistic; other Alexandrian texts (e.g. Callimachus’ *Hymn to Delos*) reveal a similar desire to preserve and explain almost lost customs, separating later accretions while remaining highly aware of the anachronisms involved in telling the story of beginnings many centuries later. This is especially the case with the Passover account, the centre of the drama. In both texts τὸ

⁴⁸ At *IT* 1191–1221 Iphigenia persuades Thoas to let her take the Greeks to sea; at 1462–1467 the clothes of women who have died in childbirth will be dedicated to Iphigenia.

⁴⁹ At *Hipp.* 1423–1430 Artemis announces that girls will dedicate locks of hair to Hippolytus before their weddings. Hippolytus was the object of cult in Athens and Troizen. See further Michael R. Halleran, *Euripides: Hippolytus* (Warminster 1995) 21–22, 266.

πάσχα is introduced as a concept already known (*Exagoge* 157; Exodus 12:21) rather than a new institution. Ezekiel also continues Exodus' association of the Passover, the death of the firstborn, and the Festival of Unleavened Cakes:

πάντες τοσαύτας ἡμέρας ἔτος κατά
ἄζυμα ἔδεσθε καὶ θεῷ λατρεύετε,
τὰ πρωτότευκτα ζῶα θύοντες θεῷ

Everyone for that same number of days each year
Will eat unleavened bread and worship God,
Offering the first born of living things as a sacrifice to God
(*Exagoge* 170–173)

This is a correlation still ritualised in the modern Passover Seder;⁵⁰ which fulfils the biblical command (included as aetiology):

καὶ φυλάξετε τὴν ἐντολὴν ταύτην· ἐν γὰρ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ ἐξάξω
τὴν δύναμιν ὑμῶν ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου, καὶ ποιήσετε τὴν ἡμέραν
ταύτην εἰς γενεὰς ὑμῶν νόμιμον αἰώνιον

Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.⁵¹
(Exodus 12:17)

While the concern with aetiology is clear even in Exodus, it is even more marked in Ezekiel's text, where the whole story of the plagues becomes an aetiology directly explaining the Exodus and Passover. The plagues are intended to "put a stop to the pride of these evil men," but "king Pharaoh will not be persuaded by anything I say"; it is not "until he holds his firstborn son dead" that "he will swiftly send the people forth." The logical connections are even more evident in the Greek particles:

⁵⁰ See B. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley/London 1984), and J. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover* (London 1963).

⁵¹ It is interesting that the NIV translates φυλάξετε and ποιήσετε as imperatives and ἐξάξω as past, not future. A more literal translation is found in L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha* (London 1851) 85: "And ye shall keep this commandment, for on this day will I bring out your force out of the land of Egypt; and ye shall make this day a perpetual ordinance for you throughout your generations."

παύσω δ' ὕβριν ἀνθρώπων κακῶν.
 Φαραὼ δὲ Βασιλεὺς πείσεται οὐδὲν ὧν λέγω,
 πλὴν τέκνον αὐτοῦ πρωτόγονον ἔξει νεκρόν·
 καὶ τότε φοβηθεὶς λαὸν ἐκπέμψει ταχύ·
 (*Exagoge* 148–151)

The importance given to aetiology surfaces also in the smearing of the door with blood, which is linked with the etymology and efficacy of the Passover:

αἵματι ψαῦσαι θύρας,
 ὅπως παρέλθῃ σῆμα δεινὸς ἄγγελος.
 smear the doors with blood
 So the deadly angel might pass over the sign.
 (*Exagoge* 158–159)

καὶ παραλεύσεται Κύριος πατάξαι τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους, καὶ ὄψεται τὸ αἷμα ἐπὶ τῆς φλιάς, καὶ ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρων τῶν σταθμῶν· καὶ παρελεύσεται Κύριος τὴν θύραν, καὶ οὐκ ἀφήσει τὸν ὀλοθρεύοντα εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὰς οἰκίας ὑμῶν πατάξαι.

When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

(Exodus 12:23)

The etymology of Passover is commonly explained by the “passing over” of the “destroyer” (as in the Hebrew *pesach*); blood is likewise seen as apotropaic. This aetiology was itself allegorised by Philo (*Quaest. Exod.* 1.12):

Why does he command [them] to place some of the blood upon the doorposts and upon the lintel of every house?

That is [because] ... at that time every house became an altar and a temple of God for the contemplative, wherefore He rightly deemed them worthy of making divine offerings of blood upon the front parts of each [house] that they might, at the same time, showing contempt of their enemies, sacrifice without fear ... That is the literal meaning. But as for the deeper meaning, it is this. Since our soul is threefold, the heart is likened to the lintel, desire to the house, and reason to the two doorposts.

(transl. R. Marcus)

The Passover prescriptions in Fragment 14 develop these aetiologies in a remarkable way. In the biblical narrative, the Passover is explained before it even occurs; certainly before be-

coming an institution. Ezekiel stresses this aspect of his source in rewriting Exodus 12:21–28—again as a speech, but here perhaps spoken by Moses rather than God—and privileging it (in the extant fragment) over the prescriptive detail. These directions are not for one isolated event, as at the start of fr.13 and Exodus 12:1–13, but rather, instructions for a permanent, recurring institution. However, the memory of that first occurrence is what gives the institution meaning as it is repeated “just as on that very morning” (ὅπως ἂν ἡσπερ ἡοῦς ἐφύγεται, *Exagoge* 167–168).

While Exodus separates prescriptions for the first, and subsequent, Passovers, Ezekiel merges them (in the extant text) to concentrate on the aetiological, memorialising significance of sacrifice. Although these fragments naturally bear similarities to Exodus’ aetiologies, which the *Exagoge* to some extent must also negotiate,⁵² the (Alexandrian) aetiological tradition bears a new significance in Ezekiel’s text. Its self-reflexivity points toward the wider project of re-ritualisation, emphasising that the Passover is not an isolated event, but, once its meaning and importance have been explained, necessarily repeated, retold and re-imagined.

Ezekiel’s drama is, then, a verbal liturgy to replace physical sacrifice during the Diaspora; a weaker, cultural form of strategies further developed after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Support for this claim is found in Philo (quoted above), who demonstrates the type of language found more commonly post-destruction. The highly allegorical nature of Philo’s writing makes it difficult to interpret, but if he does provide contemporary evidence that sacrifices were in fact made outside of Jerusalem, it is telling that he also resorts to Exodus to find a replacement for Temple ritual. While this familial practice described by Philo claims Exodus as an aetiological authority, Ezekiel responds to this same text differently. Following Scriptural prescription, he recognises the ideological importance of a

⁵² It is not possible here to develop this interesting problem further, but it is worth noting that Exodus’ aetiologies repeatedly occur before the event, in contrast to the Greek ritual aetiologies often given at the end of tragedies to explain already well-established ritual behaviour.

community celebration, while also obeying the injunction not to “celebrate the Passover in [other] cities, nor in any place save before the tabernacle of the Lord” (Jub 21). His particular situation demands that the story be retold in a new way, the concept of sacrifice configured differently.

Words become a replacement for action, as later, after the collapse of the social and religious structure based around the Temple: “now, when there is no Temple, I have engaged in fasting ... May ... my fat and blood ... be regarded as if I had offered them on the Altar.”⁵³ Likewise, services on the modern Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) narrate what would have occurred at the Temple. A new form of self-expression is required: Judaism allows a remarkable freedom within tradition; in the same way that Rabbi Yehoshua replied to Rabbi Eliezer “the law is not in heaven”⁵⁴ and the Passover Seder can substitute for Temple sacrifice, Ezekiel’s retelling of the first Passover story substitutes for its ritual re-enactment.

Midrashic memorialisation in the Diaspora

Ezekiel does not focus on the initial Passover (as Philo does), but uses it to discuss what happens afterwards: the repetition of ritual, remembrance, and the development of *midrash* (exegetic storytelling).⁵⁵ The Passover prescriptions are described repeatedly in Exodus, symbolising within the text that which it ordains for ritual (10:2):

ὅπως διηγῆσθε εἰς τὰ ὅτα τῶν τέκνων ὑμῶν, καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις
τῶν τέκνων ὑμῶν, ὅσα ἐμπέπαιχα τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις, καὶ τὰ σημεῖά
μου, ἃ ἐποίησα ἐν αὐτοῖς· καὶ γνῶσεσθε ὅτι ἐγὼ Κύριος.

that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt
harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs
among them, and that you may know that I am the Lord.

The Passover as ritual celebration self-consciously locates itself,

⁵³ Rab. Sheshet, quoted by Simon Goldhill, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (London 2004) 94.

⁵⁴ Deut 30:12; Talmud, *Bava M'tzia* 59b.

⁵⁵ For discussion and examples of *midrash*, see H. Schwartz, *Reimagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis* (New York/Oxford 1998), and G. Bruns, “Midrash and Allegory: The Beginnings of Scriptural Interpretation,” in Alter/Kermode, *Literary Guide* 625–646.

even from its beginning, within this storytelling tradition (12:26–27):

καὶ ἔσται ἐὰν λέγωσι πρὸς ὑμᾶς οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν, τίς ἡ λατρεία αὕτη; καὶ ἐρεῖτε αὐτοῖς, θυσία τὸ πάσχα τοῦτο Κυρίῳ, ὡς ἐσκέπασε τοὺς οἴκους τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ, ἡνίκα ἐπάταξε τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους, τοὺς δὲ οἴκους ἡμῶν ἐρρύσατο·

And when your children ask you, “What does this ceremony mean to you?” then tell them, “It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.”

This story is so important, however, that it is not only to be continually repeated “on your lips,” but also inscribed as a “sign” and “reminder” on hands and foreheads “year after year” (13:8–10):

καὶ ἀναγγελεῖς τῷ υἱῷ σου ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, λέγων, διὰ τοῦτο ἐποίησε Κύριος ὁ Θεός μοι, ὡς ἐξεπορευόμην ἐξ Αἰγύπτου. καὶ ἔσται σοι σημεῖον ἐπὶ τῆς χειρὸς σου, καὶ μνημόσυνον πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν σου, ὅπως ἂν γένηται ὁ νόμος Κυρίου ἐν τῷ στόματί σου· ἐν γὰρ χειρὶ κραταίᾳ ἐξήγαγέ σε Κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἐξ Αἰγύπτου. καὶ φυλάξασθε τὸν νόμον τοῦτον κατὰ καιροὺς ὥρων, ἀφ’ ἡμερῶν εἰς ἡμέρας.

On that day tell your son, “I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.” This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the Lord is to be on your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year.

This last passage is used in the modern Passover Seder, itself a “creation of and a response to life in the Diaspora,”⁵⁶ as part of the haggadic explanation for the ritual of the Questions.⁵⁷ Used as aetiology for sacrifice during the era of sacrificial cult at the Temple, this now also explains the symbolic food used to memorialise that sacrificial ritual, in addition to the original Passover. Roasted shank-bones represent the paschal sacrifice, while baked eggs commemorate other sacrifices and the

⁵⁶ Fredman, *Passover Seder* 3.

⁵⁷ For a text, see N. N. Glatzer, *The Passover Haggadah* (New York 1953).

Temple's destruction.⁵⁸ In this light the *Exagoge* must be read as another such exegetic project.

For a Jew under Greek rule, away from Temple-based sacrificial cult, midrashic exegesis became a fitting replacement for sacrifice during the Diaspora and a means of self-definition. "Since in the eyes of the faithful the uniqueness of the Temple was sacred, geographical distance could in no manner justify the practice of 'parallel' worship";⁵⁹ so believers outside Jerusalem needed to seek alternative forms of worship.

Although there were several synagogues in all sectors of Alexandria,⁶⁰ these were an institution which appeared during the Diaspora as a response to precisely this problem of distance but which would (and could) not assume a central role until after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Modrzejewski considers that the existence of liturgy in synagogue practice prior to the fall of the Temple has not been clearly established,⁶¹ but that from the evidence we do have, it seems that the principal form of worship in Egypt and Judaea was reading the Torah.

Reading aloud is a form of performance. Given the debates considered earlier over the performativity of Hellenistic texts,⁶² and in particular about whether the *Exagoge* was read aloud or staged, it seems likely that the boundaries between ritual and reading could have been blurred by a text such as Ezekiel's. Moreover, it seems that synagogues sometimes hosted other sorts of activities; although it is hard to know exactly what these would have been, a first-century BCE ostrakon from Edfu (Apollonopolis Magna) bears witness to a Jewish "club" which sponsored a series of banquets: this might possibly have included a Passover Seder,⁶³ and, although it would be rash to speculate excessively, it is tempting to think that this might

⁵⁸ Fredman, *Passover Seder* 14.

⁵⁹ Joseph Mélèze Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: from Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian* (Edinburgh 1985) 95.

⁶⁰ Philo *Leg.* 132.

⁶¹ Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt* 95.

⁶² See 395 ff. above.

⁶³ Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt* 97.

have been the sort of context in which the *Exagoge* would have been read or performed.

Yet however and wherever the *Exagoge* might have been used, certainly Ezekiel's decision to align his example of *midrash* so closely with Greek culture through the Greek tragic model has interesting implications for the author and audience's self-definition. The Alexandrian Jewish community at this time appears to have been strong, despite political oppression. Papyri and inscriptions suggest that this community was not as alienated as previously thought: Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt could belong to the "Hellenic" community and be Greek in language, culture, and social status without surrendering their Jewish faith.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, we cannot imagine its members were completely at home:⁶⁵ the position rather appears to have been a "tightrope walk," symbolised by the very fact of Jews mainly engaging with Judaism through the medium of Greek. Ezekiel's reapplication of a transcendent biblical narrative for his particular generation is simultaneously Hellenistic and Alexandrian, but also fulfils the biblical command for remembrance and replication of the construction of sacrificial ritual.

Conclusion: re-reading Exodus

Ezekiel's attempt to find a means of being both Jewish and Greek is temporally and topically specific, but also has wider implications for subsequent re-readings of Exodus. The *Exagoge's* appropriation of Exodus cannot be a one-way process; rather, the appropriation must to some extent be reciprocal: one cannot approach the original text in the same way as before, but is forced to view it through new lenses. This understanding of the consequences of reception is complicated by the fact that Exodus itself is not a neutral "baseline." Already a highly selective, didactic text by Ezekiel's time, the material has been further shaped by later rabbinic concerns, as well as Christian exegesis⁶⁶ and modern applications. However, what I

⁶⁴ Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt* 82.

⁶⁵ Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt* 89.

⁶⁶ See e.g. D. Cohn-Sherbok, *Exodus: An Agenda for Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (London 1992), and R. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (London 1978).

have suggested is that the *Exagoge* be seen as part of the midrashic tradition. This solves the apparent problem of how one can re-read Exodus; because Ezekiel resists tragedy to retell the Scriptural story, he does not problematise the text so much as reinforce Jewish Hellenistic cultural identity.

The *Exagoge* is a performatively charged text. Whether it was read (probably aloud) or staged, the process of actively re-writing and performing Exodus fulfils both the ideological purpose of sacrifice (communication with God) and its later memorialisation of the first Passover. The *Exagoge*'s resistance to "Tragedy" is essential for this; it must be understood as both aligned with and part of the Jewish midrashic, as well as the Greek tragic, tradition.

Ezekiel's choice of the Exodus narrative is therefore neither surprising nor arbitrary on account of its "untragic" nature; rather, only this story of the construction of sacrificial ritual that later became focused on the Temple is suitable. Likewise, his choice to appropriate the tragic genre is the only one possible: not only is tragedy—and the propriety of tragic diction—the perfect form in which to retell a story in the Greek city of Alexandria but, because of tragedy's ritualistic connotations, the *Exagoge* becomes essential to Jewish Hellenistic religious regeneration. Ezekiel's dramatic project not only succeeds in answering the quintessentially Jewish exilic question, "how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Ps 137:4, KJV), but, in so doing, replaces sacrificial ritual with a new liturgical performance.⁶⁷

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